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ABSTRACT

The notion of what is meant by the term "crazy" is explored and certain aspects of the educational system are labeled "crazy." The confusing array of federal and state policies dealing with students with emotional disturbances is noted, and questions are posed to educators and practitioners to illustrate the need to be open to new knowledge and new information. Aspects of society considered crazy include mankind's mistreatment and exploitation of the environment. Crazy, it is suggested, means operating in ways contrary to avowed goals and objectives. In conclusion, the need to examine current procedures and become open to change in ourselves and our systems is cited. (CL)

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Who's Crazy? II

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Who's Crazy? originated when I was president of the Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders. I gave it as the dinner address at the 1981 Arizona State University Conference on Severe Behavior Disorders of Children and Youth. After that, I took *Who's Crazy?* to Austin, Texas, Louisville, Kentucky, and New York City. Overall it had a good run, but in dusting it off, I found it no longer fit the changes that have occurred in me or in the world. So it has been changed in part. Since it no longer is the same presentation, I thought it fitting to informally assign it a new title, which is *Who's Crazy? II.*

I also think it is fitting to present *Who's Crazy? II* at a conference on the problems of adolescents with behavioral disorders. Adolescence has been characterized as a developmental period involving numerous transitions, passages, and turbulence. Whether this is true for any given adolescent, I can't say, but as the father of two such persons, I can testify it is true for this parent. My children can run me through a gammit of emotions and lead me to doubt myself in fundamental ways. And they are relatively "normal." Having worked with behaviorally disordered adolescents, I know how they can drain a person of his/her personal resources and leave him/her totally confused about what to do or even who she/he is.

From a scientific point of view, the logical place to begin is to operationally define *crazy*. I intentionally chose this term over the jargon preferred in our profession, such as psychotic, emotionally disturbed, or behaviorally disordered, because it more accurately conveys my impression that such labels are readily applied to anything or anybody we don't understand or with whom we disagree. The judgment that someone or something is crazy is relative and situational. It depends upon who is doing the judging, the standards against which they are judging, and the limits of the context in which the judgment is applied. Therefore, I'm going to opt out of defining craziness at the outset, and instead allow you to use your informal, private frame of reference to define this term. As I go on, perhaps we'll develop some concensus about what this means. I certainly hope to let you knowing what *I* think craziness is.

So, who's crazy? The way I see it, there are several candidates for the title. You might think of this as a multiple choice test. It is (a) children and youth —our traditional choice; (b) ourselves — by which I mean teachers, teacher trainers, and other professional caretakers; (c) The "system" — which includes schools, agencies of state and federal government, as well as professional organizations; (d) society itself; or (e) all of the above. I'd like to examine each of these alternatives briefly.

First, let's take children. The bad kid business depends on the existence of bad kids. And there appears to be no shortage. The supply of crazy children is

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in a constant state of renewal because of such factors as an increasing birth rate, new drugs, widely varying standards of behavior, and the like. As William Rhodes (1967, 1970) has pointed out, it is convenient to claim that craziness resides in youth because they're the weakest, the least able to resist being labeled and intervened upon. The question is, should we label and intervene? The logical answer to this is, it's our job. And a logical rejoinder is, *should* this be our job?

As a person working in a mental health related field, I see that our client population represents persons who appear to exist on the fringes of some social order. In fact, everyone undoubtedly has experienced being on the fringe of some group. It seems reasonable to propose that adolescents, in the process of searching out a place in the world, live on the fringes of many social groups. Their testing perhaps represents their way of learning about the social order, of gaining entry to some groups and rejecting others. I think this testing never stops, and by that single criterion, we are *all* adolescents.

In any case, if children are our targets, the next question is, what are we supposed to do with them? There seems to be a fair consensus that we should change them. If that is true, what should we change them into? Should they be like everybody else, or different? If different, how do we keep them from being called crazy any more? Instead of changing them, should we teach them to cope with us, and with the systems that daily impinge upon them? Or, should we teach them to change us? Perhaps the best we can do is simply reach them, and provide what support we can during their formative years.

My point is, the decision that children own the craziness we're speaking of doesn't solve our problem. Instead, it opens a Pandora's Box of problems and conflict: What should we do with them, where should we send them, how do we know whether we succeeded or failed with them? Our field is characterized by diversity regarding these issues. My belief is that some children are in fact crazy. Some are *driven* crazy, and others, perhaps most, are made to look crazy because it takes the pressure off us.

Moving on to the next candidate, let's examine the agents of change—ourselves. To explore the question of personal craziness, I prepared a little self-test, which I called *Are You Crazy?* Actually, since this is the second edition of the test, I suppose I should call it *Are You Crazy II?* Please answer covertly. Clear your desks, and keep your eyes on your own mind.

The first question is, are you happy? Are you fulfilled by your personal life, or by your career? Do you like the people with whom you live? Do they like you? Do you do things that depress you? Things you don't understand? How do you react or feel when people fail to do things you expect them to do? Do you feel constantly angry or guilty towards someone? It has been my experience that the supreme test of our humanity lies in our ability to form mutually satisfactory relationships with other persons. Ranier Maria Rilke phrased this challenge most beautifully:

> For one human being to love another, that is perhaps the most difficult of all our tasks, the ultimate, the last test and proof, the work for which all other work is but preparation.

I don't know about you, but in this area I still have much to learn. And I doubt that I ever will get it exactly right. Let's face it. We are support systems for one another. Yet we frequently seem to insist that someone we love be wrong in order for us to appear right. We take our frustrations, our vexations, our anger and guilt over daily events out on those we care for most. Well, *I* do anyway.

But let's move on. The next set of questions relates more to you as a

professional. Who's interest are you serving in the classroom? Your principal's? The parents? Yours? Or your students? Do you have objectives for you pupils? Who developed them? Are they appropriate? How do you know? Do you evaluate and revise your objectives frequently? Do you teach, or do you present information? Do you manage the classroom environment, or do you just control behavior? How do you respond to your best pupil? To your worst? Do you think IEPs are meaningless paperwork? Do you teach from them? Do you talk about your students as people, or do you use terminology which establishes them as "different" and yourself as a holy cow?

Now, here are some for supervisors and teacher trainers. Do you work in your office? Do our subordinates come to you, or do you go to them? Do they enjoy your company? Your professional advice? Do you care if your teachers or trainees are competent? Are you afraid they might appear more competent than you? Are you more concerned with having no problems to deal with? With getting published? Do you use the same techniques to train teachers that you want them to use in the classroom? Do you train them to use techniques which have been empirically validated, or those which establish you as an esoteric specialist? Do you know what your teachers do in the classroom? Do you care?

Okay. Close your test booklet, and make sure your name is on the upper right hand corner. There is no standardized criterion for this test, but I'm sure we'd all come off as a little bit crazy, if we answered these questions honestly. It's all right to be crazy; in fact, in our business, it even may be necessary. Rhodes (1980) advocated that we celebrate deviance. Unfortunately, we're too often defensive about our craziness, and fail to see how our needs interfere with serving our children. It's easier to blame the pupils than to admit our own shortcomings.

At this point, I would like to label myself. I consider myself a teacher. I am identified with the profession of teaching. You can tell teachers by the way they always want to show you something. Teachers are show-offs. In the field of special education, those who choose, or simply fall into, teaching pupils in trouble, want to show off their abilities to help other people. We all think we have talent there. The truth is, some of us do and some of us *think* we do. As teachers, we can't afford to overlook the obvious fact that in the social realm, we always will be learners first and teachers second. This is because the social order, and all of its ramifications, changes constantly. So the only role that makes sense is that of a person who is open to new knowledge and new information.

Let me turn now to the *system*. In this category, I'd just like to point out some practices that are, in my opinion, crazy. First, let's examine special education as it typically is practiced in the schools. Special education services are designed to be available only to children who have been given an official label, and generally these services are confined to special places, away from the mainstream. This separation has created two distinct worlds, what Reynolds and Birch (1977) call the "Two Box Theory." Special educators use special methods, talk in a special language, and fail to communicate with regular educators, who live in that other separate box. Public Law 94-142 notwithstanding, we're failing to create the kind of regular and special education mix that ensures successful mainstreaming. But why should we? If building administrators don't know our special technology or speak our special language, they can't hold us accountable. Of course, neither can they hold accountable regular educators who can't work with, or refuse to work with, our children, because they also lack our special skills. At one time, I facetiously suggested a slogan for CCBD: "Bad kids are good business." And

so they are. As long as we reinforce regular educators for throwing in the towel, for labeling and excluding special children, we'll have reasonably secure jobs doing just what we've done for years, which is to keep the bad pupils under control and out of the way.

Much of what we do in the schools is dictated by policies within the federal and state government, policies which never cease to amaze me. For instance, despite the mandate of P.L. 94-142 to move special education toward the regular classroom, despite the existence of a powerful and accountable technology of teaching, and despite the evidence that a noncategorical training-based service delivery system can work, we continue to perpetuate the practice of funding special education on the basis of diagnosing and labeling populations of children. Practitioners are compelled to identify, test, and label a certain number of children in order to receive financial programmatic support. This numbers game exists because special education is defined in terms of serving a fixed percentage of the school population. The bureaucratic response to finding increased numbers of children requiring special help is to "harden the categories"; in other words, to make definitions of special populations more restrictive, and thereby exclude more children from the services they need. For example, the government will fund special education for no more than 12% of the school population. The definition of the *severely emotionally disturbed* is restricted to no more than 2% by federal law. This means that many children are deprived of services until their problems reach a level of intensity sufficient to warrant inclusion in this 2%.

Furthermore, access to special services is based on information gathered from instruments, the reliability and validity of which have been questioned for several years (e.g., Arter & Jenkins, 1979; Ysseldyke, 1973). Funds are available *only* in proportion to the number of handicapped children identified by these instruments.

As if this weren't enough, the federal government complicates the numbers game by periodically recounting handicapped subpopulations and adjusting its program and training support priorities on the basis of which group currently is getting more or less than its rightful share of the available goodies. Over the past several years, these priorities have shifted from mild to severely to multiply handicapped, from the emotionally disturbed to the learning disabled, and back to the emotionally disturbed. This keeps all of us on our toes, trying not to get buried in the shifting sands and scurrying to identify enough members of the population in vogue to obtain money to support our programs.

I suppose the real craziness here lies in my assumption that empiricism will prevail over political realities. Changes in the social sciences probably are influenced more by politics than by objective evidence. It is a bitter pill to swallow sometimes. Yet I think there may be some ways that science can influence politics. Several professional persons such as Dollar and Klinger (1975), Repucci (1977), and Tharpe and Wetzel (1969) have applied scientific principles to the study and alteration of systems, with some successes and some failures. The knowledge they gained from their experiences is invaluable to anyone seeking to enter a sociopolitical organization such as a school district.

No doubt many of you think I'm overstating the case, and perhaps I am. While I do believe the government is motivated by a sincere desire to meet the needs of the handicapped, I fail to see that current policies are the best way to accomplish this goal.

The last, but certainly not the least, agent of the system which I'd like to

examine for craziness is professional organizations. For what purposes do they exist? According to our constitution, the purposes of CCBD are to promote the education and general welfare of children and youth with behavioral disorders or serious emotional disturbance, and to promote professional growth and research as a means to better understand the problems of these children. These sound pretty good to me. But what objectives do professional organizations serve in practice? Over a decade ago, Lilly (1970) observed that the major concern of the membership of the Council for Exceptional Children, as expressed in the Delegate Assembly at the 1970 convention, was more efficient and effective means of processing membership forms and renewal notices.

My point here is that whatever the basis for establishing an organization, its purpose evolves into self-perpetuation. Often this means acting in ways contrary to the original service goals of the organization.

The last area I proposed to examine is society. This task appeared so awesome that I declined to attempt it in the original *Who's Crazy?* However, I have been sufficiently aroused by recent environmental atrocities to mention a few indications that we live in a crazy world. For example, a national network broadcast a feature which began with the announcement that "Tonight, we'll visit an area that has become infested with great white sharks." When I heard this, I imagined Manhattan Island teeming with sharks, somehow wriggling up Fifth Avenue to Central Park, devouring pedestrians along the way. Imagine my surprise when I learned that they meant the sharks were infesting the ocean! How is it possible for a species to infest its natural environment? And where do we get the audacity to suggest that we have more of a right to the sea than one of its oldest inhabitants? If any species can be accused of infesting their environment, it is *Homo Sapien*. Jacques Cousteau once estimated that ocean life has been depleted by 40% in the two score years he has been exploring the depths. We read almost daily of oil spills and wildlife kills, yet our relentless exploitations of natural resources continues to take precedence over the protection of the other inhabitants of the earth. A recent BC comic strip proclaimed that man's ultimate goal is to protect all the species he endangers. That may be cynical, but I wish it were true.

Do we need other examples? Consider hazardous air pollution, acid rain, rivers that burn, toxic wastes, strip mining, clear cutting, depletion of the ozone layer, and that most hideous crime of all, nuclear proliferation. What right do we have to put ourselves above all things on the earth in the name of a higher gross national product? I believe the ultimate international product may be a planet devoid of life. But since that might not occur for several more generations, we can nod our heads in agreement with the problem, and go back to thinking about ourselves. The heroine of Tom Robbins' *Another Roadside Attraction* gave us something else to think about when, in reply to the question "What is your goal in life?", she said, "To live lightly on the earth." All creatures of the planet are support systems for one another. Can we learn to live in harmony before it is too late?

Please excuse me if I have over-editorialized. I'll return to subject matter closer to our field as I conclude. Well then, what does crazy mean? To me, it means we operate in ways contrary to our avowed goals and objectives. In other words, our behavior becomes self-defeating. This definition applies whether we're talking about individuals or entire social systems. Obviously I think craziness exists in all of the levels I've been describing. Yet, since we're bigger and stronger, because our institutions are more established (and even stronger than us), we focus our attention on the craziness we allege to reside

in children and insist that the changes occur in them instead of ourselves. The enemy, therefore, is us.

Can we change things? I think we can, and in some areas we have. What we need is a new special education. I advocate the training-based model Lilly (1971) proposed over 10 years ago. the major components of this model are support services in the regular classroom, and training and support for teachers and students experiencing problems, not just for children with labels. I also advocate new contingencies of reinforcement. these contingencies include teacher certification and advancement based on demonstrated competence and achievement of child objectives; program funding based on services, not numbers of children; special education services which are provided to those in need, not just to those who have been labeled. Such reform requires supervisors who themselves are knowledgeable, a knowledgeable and involved public, and application of our technology to the systems that effect the education of all chiidren and youth.

"It can't be done," you say, "It has been done," I say. Examples include Vermont's Consulting Teacher Program (McKenzie, Egner, Perelman, Schneider, & Garvin, 1970, Knight, 1978) which has been providing noncategorical mainstream support services to children in educational need for over 10 years. A newer example is Minnesota's own Special Education Resource Teacher Delivery System piloted by Deno and Mirkin (1978). True, these examples apply more to mainstreaming than to more restrictive special services, but I think fundamental changes must occur which open up special education (or any treatment system) to make it part of a whole continuum of services to people, rather than a closed box to which others react out of ignorance and suspicion, if not outright fear.

Anyway, a new special education is technically possible, as are new public attitudes toward deviance and mental health treatment. Extending applications of these new approaches and beliefs throughout the country requires that we carefully examine what we are doing, drop some of our cherished beliefs, and go to work on changing ourselves and our systems. If we fail to do this, we are indeed crazy.

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